
Out-of-School and Out-of-Data?

Out-of-School Learners in the European Agency Statistics
on Inclusive Education (EASIE)

Conceptual Working Paper



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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INTRODUCTION

This conceptual working paper aims to inform developments related to data collection on out-of-school learners in the [European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education](#) (EASIE) work. This is in preparation for the annual data collection exercises, which replaced biennial data collection in 2020.

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) carries out the EASIE data collection work. EASIE aims to provide clearly focused data that informs Agency member country policy developments for inclusive education. These policy developments are in line with the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (European Commission, 2017), [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#) on education (United Nations, 2015) and the implementation of [Article 24](#) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006).

EASIE work is fully aligned with the European Commission's strategic objectives for education and training, as most recently outlined in the 2020 Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025. The Communication highlights the need to identify targets and indicators to guide and monitor progress towards the European Education Area through internationally comparable and regularly gathered data. It also outlines how the annual European Education and Training Monitor will 'consistently analyse data by gender, socio-economic status, special educational needs, and minority or migrant background' (European Commission, 2020, p. 28).

The EASIE work involves 31 Agency member countries, covering 35 jurisdictions.¹

The starting point for the work is the [Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems](#). It presents the vision for inclusive education systems as ensuring that 'all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers' (European Agency, 2015, p. 1).

The Agency position supports the argument that inclusive education:

... seeks to identify and dismantle barriers to education for all children so that they have access to, are present and participate in and achieve optimal academic and social outcomes from school (Slee, 2018, p. 2).

Inclusion in education is fundamentally about all learners' **presence, placement, participation** and achievement, or **progress** (Ainscow, 2016).

UNESCO (in press) outlines how the dimensions of presence, placement, participation and progress should be understood as hierarchical: presence in the education system is a prerequisite for any educational placement. This, in turn, determines opportunities for participation and then progress. Presence within the education system can be measured

¹ Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).



by the enrolment rates in different forms of educational provision and by the numbers of learners who are not enrolled when they should be, i.e. learners who are often termed ‘out-of-school’.

Data on the presence of all learners in the education system

The EASIE data collection exercises examine a range of equity issues for education, including access to mainstream education (linked to presence) and access to inclusive education (linked to placement). They include specific data on learners who are officially recognised as having special educational needs (SEN) and data breakdowns by gender.

Since its inception, a number of specific questions within the [EASIE data collection](#) work have considered issues around out-of-school learners, that is learners who are and who are not enrolled in and/or attending school.

However, current data from countries linked to these questions is usually partial, missing or indicated as not applicable. The EASIE [Key Messages and Findings](#) report indicates that:

The situation of learners who are out of school for different reasons and under different circumstances (i.e. formally enrolled in education but do not attend, or not enrolled in any form of education) is unclear in almost all countries. This requires further examination, as data for most countries is often limited or missing (European Agency, 2018, p. 8).

Data collection exercises, where some countries report on out-of-school learners but other countries do not, result in some data comparisons being biased or potentially not possible. As the Eurydice report on *Equity in school education in Europe* suggests:

... research on educational inequalities has to keep in mind that international assessment surveys only sample students that are in school, leaving out completely those who have left education early. This affects education systems differently depending on the proportion of out-of-school children in the population (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020, p. 34.)

If the EASIE data collection does not (sufficiently) address the question of out-of-school learners, issues of data comparability across countries will also be apparent. Out-of-school learners may represent a small number within the overall population of learners that the EASIE work considers. Nevertheless, they are an important group within Agency member countries’ systems for inclusive education. It is therefore vital to ensure that the total population of learners is visible within the EASIE data collection work.

Recognising that comparable data on the issue is not currently available, the Agency’s Representative Board members agreed that data on out-of-school learners was an area for further examination. Possibilities for data collection on this issue were initially discussed with the nominated EASIE data experts in 2018. During the 2019 working meeting with the data experts, the issues were discussed in detail. As a result of that



meeting, it was agreed that two inter-connected information-gathering activities would take place:

- first, desk research to compile relevant European and international background information on and around the concept of out-of-school learners;
- then, drawing on the desk research findings, a survey for national data collection experts on current and future possibilities for data collection on out-of-school learners.

Both of these activities were completed in 2019–2020. The full [Background Information Report](#) (European Agency, 2020a) and full [Country Survey Results](#) (European Agency, 2020b) are available as separate documents.

This conceptual working paper does not detail the information collected via these activities. Rather, it aims to present the main findings from the activities that have been built upon to identify next steps in addressing this key issue within future EASIE data collection exercises.

Section 1 presents a synthesis of the main desk research findings on the [concept of out-of-school learners](#).

Section 2 summarises the main findings on current and possible future [data on out-of-school learners](#) from the country survey.

Sections 1 and 2 indicate potential key messages for future EASIE work. Based on the key messages, section 3 identifies possible [implications for EASIE work](#) and, based on that, ways forward for the annual EASIE data collection from 2020 onwards.



1. EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNERS

The [Background Information Report](#) (European Agency, 2020a) presents an overview of the current data collection situation on out-of-school learners. The desk research considered over 60 reports and papers published since 2000, and website and database information from main European and international data providers (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); Eurydice, etc.). The final report includes research perspectives and information from studies conducted in the field and on data collection at national and international levels.

This report considers three main topics:

- The concept of out-of-school learners: the key question is **what does being an out-of-school learner mean?**
- Different forms of current data collection on out-of-school learners: the key question is **what data is being collected?**
- Perspectives for future work for out-of-school data monitoring systems: the key question is **what future data should countries collect?**

The report presents a number of findings that indicate areas for possible change and development. The report's main findings and key messages can be summarised in relation to the three key questions.

1.1 What does being an out-of-school learner mean?

The UNESCO *Global Education Monitoring Report* (2020) argues that developments in increasing educational participation are 'stagnating' globally. It estimates that 258 million children, adolescents and youth, or 17% of the total, are not in school.

It is important to highlight not only that this figure is estimated, but that there are no clear explanations of what educational participation entails, or who the total of children, adolescents and youth actually encompasses. At national and international levels, the term 'out-of-school' (OoS) refers to an extremely broad topic that needs to be further understood.

An examination of the literature relating to national-level work shows that different terms are used across and within countries to refer to OoS. These include 'not enrolled', 'drop-out', 'early school leavers' and 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET). In addition, there is ambiguity around the notion of 'absenteeism'. A learner's transition from being 'absent from school' to formally 'dropping out' is rarely clearly defined in research or data collection. In particular, it seems the factors of duration and frequency require further consideration in distinguishing between the two concepts; the increased frequency and/or longer duration of a learner's absence(s) from school are a potential determining factor in them being labelled as having dropped out.



At the international level, there is no consensus on the meaning of ‘out-of-school’. Every international organisation has its own way of approaching similar topics and concepts in education. Within work linked to Sustainable Development Goal 4, UNESCO has developed the following working definitions:

- Out-of-school children: ‘Children in the official primary school age range who are not enrolled in either primary or secondary school’ (2018, p. 356).
- Out-of-school adolescents and youth: ‘Those of lower or upper secondary school age who are not enrolled in primary, secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary or tertiary education’ (ibid.).

This approach towards out-of-school learners highlights the important dimensions of age and school enrolment in understanding who out-of-school learners are. It mirrors work conducted by European organisations ([Eurostat](#); [Eurydice](#)) where the concept of ‘out-of-school’ is most often directly linked to a country’s compulsory education framework.

UNICEF and UIS (2015) observe a number of ‘possible realities’ for children who might be considered out-of-school. Such children:

- do not have access to a school in their community;
- do not enrol despite the availability of a school;
- enrol, but later than they should have;
- enrol in schools that have poor facilities/no teachers;
- drop out of the education system;
- enrol, but do not attend school.

This discussion of different realities highlights the important dimension of **access to educational provision**.

Despite there being no accepted definition, it is evident that being considered out-of-school is most often linked to a **learner’s age in relation to compulsory education, as well as their access to, enrolment in and participation in some form of educational provision**.

1.2 What data is being collected?

As there is no agreement on the concept of who out-of-school learners are, there are differences between and within national, European and international data collection work relating to out-of-school learners, or out-of-school children (OOSC). UNICEF and UIS argue that there is:

... a general lack of adequate tools and methodologies to identify OOSC, to measure the scope and describe the complexity of exclusion and disparities, to assess the reasons for exclusion, and to inform policy and planning (2016, p. 7).

It is clear that data on the participation and attendance in school of some groups of learners is easier to collect and use for tracking purposes than for other groups. UNICEF



and UIS (2016) have developed a model to illustrate possible data availability. It focuses on out-of-school learners who are visible, semi-visible and invisible:

- **Visible OoS learners** are recorded as having been enrolled in school and so are recorded when they leave school for any reason. Most countries are able to provide data on these OoS learners.
- **Semi-visible OoS learners** are unrecorded drop-outs and individuals who have never enrolled in school. Far fewer countries are able to provide data on these OoS learners.
- **Invisible OoS learners** are invisible in databases, which makes them uncountable. They cannot be identified from any data or monitoring systems. They are not represented in any database.

This model highlights the importance for any data collection exercise of:

- using consistent identification procedures within the data collection for visible OoS learners;
- improving data collection for semi-visible OoS learners, so that more of them become visible;
- examining the possible reasons why some OoS learners are hidden in the system and actively trying to find ways to identify them.

The UNESCO *Global Education Monitoring Regional Report* (in press), covering 30 countries from Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, highlights the importance of data on out-of-school learners in all debates around inclusive education. Countries need data on this particularly vulnerable group. However, the report findings underline that many countries in the region lack both data and legal definitions of out-of-school learners.

The data that is available clearly indicates that there are significant numbers of learners whose legal right to access education is not being met. However, more reliable and internationally comparable data will require the **development of clearer definitions of out-of-school learners**. These definitions must then be used to **actively collect data on such learners** so they can be followed and monitored over time.

1.3 What future data should countries collect?

The information synthesis in the Background Information Report (European Agency, 2020a) identifies a number of implications for future work. The first is the **need for future data collection to be based on an agreed and shared definition** of OoS. Different meanings of the concept can be observed. This appears to be one of the limitations of current work in the field.

Aligned with the need for a clear definition, there is scope to **extend data collection work** in a number of ways:

- The scope of the population investigated should take into consideration individuals who are not currently represented in the data, to give more accurate information.



-
- Data collection should involve different methods and types of data (i.e. quantitative and qualitative data from education system and research sources).
 - Data is required from different actors working in different sectors (i.e. health, social and justice) and at different levels (national, regional, local, school, community organisations) in the education system and possibly beyond.

Crucially, the Background Information Report highlights a key question: should learners enrolled in programmes in other, non-school-based learning settings be considered out-of-school? **The use of the term ‘school’ may limit data collection** to traditional school settings. **Future data collection should recognise and account for** the role of **non-formal** and/or **alternative education** programmes and of **educational provision provided by sectors other than education**.

These main findings from the Background Information Report were used as the framework for the focused country survey, presented in [Section 2](#).



2. COUNTRY DATA ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNERS

The country survey aimed to explore specific issues Agency member countries face around data collection on OoS learners. In a 2019 working meeting with the nominated EASIE data experts, two key questions were agreed in the formulation of the survey:

1. What data on OoS is currently available in countries?
2. What future data could potentially be collected?

A short survey with eight open-ended questions was developed and sent to all Agency member countries in late 2019. The questions considered definitions and data availability. Countries were also asked to provide any available additional information. This was integrated into the final draft of the Background Information Report (European Agency, 2020a) where relevant.

Nineteen countries replied to the survey: Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (UK) (Scotland) and UK (Wales).

The [Country Survey Results](#) report presents the full responses from all countries (European Agency, 2020b).

The following sections present a summary of the main results.

2.1 What does being an out-of-school learner mean in countries?

2.1.1 How is the concept of out-of-school learners defined in countries?

With just one exception,² countries do not have a legislative definition of ‘out-of-school learners’. However, countries use several working definitions to understand the term ‘out-of-school’ in different ways. These working definitions refer to a range of concepts and/or categories (as detailed in [Section 2.1.2](#)). Within these categories, two recurring elements are particularly relevant for data collection work:

- **age of learners:** the age range the working definition relates to;
- **education provider:** which education provider(s) are included in or covered by the working definition.

2.1.2 What key issues do country working definitions cover?

Eighteen countries provided detailed information on their working definitions. These definitions cover a range of different concepts related to OoS learners. Each country listed

² Latvia is the only country with an existing legal definition of out-of-school learners: ‘Students of compulsory education age (5–18) who are not enrolled (registered) on the list of any educational institution of Latvia’.



many categories. The most common categories and the numbers of countries that listed them were:

- Drop-out (12 countries)
- Absenteeism (11 countries)
- Early school leavers (9 countries)
- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) (9 countries)
- Home education (9 countries)
- Health conditions and hospitalisation (8 countries)
- Migration and unaccompanied children (5 countries)
- Disability and special needs (5 countries)
- Young people and detention (4 countries)
- Non-formal education (4 countries).

In addition, individual countries listed some other categories, such as child and/or educational poverty, travellers, vulnerable groups and learners in very rural areas.

For many countries, a learner may be visible (counted) in more than one category. In addition, these categories can overlap with other at-risk groups.

The information provided clearly indicates that **many different concepts and categories are used within and between countries when talking about out-of-school learners**. Why and under what conditions a learner is identified as out-of-school differs for all countries. This highlights the need to develop shared working definitions for future data collection.

2.1.3 What challenges do the country definitions present?

The countries' definitions create a range of challenges. The main issues reported by countries include:

- clear definitions of the categories listed in [Section 2.1.2](#) are sometimes lacking;
- the definitions may overlap groups of learners, meaning that a learner could be listed in several different categories;
- it is difficult to collect data on newly arrived/migrant learners. These learners could still be officially enrolled in a school in their former country. Learners who live in one country may also be enrolled in a school in another country;
- learners attending non-compulsory education;
- learners belonging to families with unknown residence, who move a lot, etc.;
- co-ordination with other ministries, such as social affairs, justice and health;
- co-ordination between different local authorities results in difficulties collecting national-level data;
- non-formal educational provision that does not support data collection.



For possible future data collection on out-of-school learners, it seems **important to have working definitions that cover all categories, but do not overlap** across categories, so that a learner can only be counted once.

2.2 What data is being collected in countries?

2.2.1 What national data on out-of-school learners is currently collected in countries?

The vast majority of countries (18 out of 19) that responded to the survey do not collect data that **directly** targets OoS learners. The reasons for this are related to the information in sections [2.1.2](#) and [2.1.3](#).

Rather, data is collected on different categories of learners **that can be related to** OoS learners. The different forms of data collection mainly refer to specific vulnerable groups of learners, such as:

- learners who play truant;
- learners with problematic absenteeism;
- early school leavers;
- learners with disabilities or health conditions;
- learners in hospital;
- learners with a migrant background;
- learners who are home educated.

The number of different categories used for data collection again highlights the **need for agreed definitions to ensure comparable data**, within and between countries.

2.2.2 Can countries provide data on out-of-school learners for EASIE?

Within the most recent EASIE data collection work, three questions ask for data linked to the issue of out-of-school learners:

- All children/learners out of formal educational settings
- Children/learners of a specific age who are out of formal education
- Children/learners with an official decision of SEN who are out of formal education.

For the 2014, 2016 and 2018 [data collection exercises](#), the majority of countries could not provide data on the numbers of out-of-school learners.

In the country survey, countries were asked if they felt they had reliable data for these questions. Eighteen countries responded. Only one (Lithuania) stated that it could provide reliable data for the first two questions. For the third question, no country can provide data at this time. The vast majority of countries stated that the reason no reliable data exists on this issue is that there are no official and/or legal definitions and, therefore, no specific data collection on OoS learners.

Ten countries (Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK (Scotland), UK (Wales)) stated that there is no other available data to inform on OoS



learners. Eight countries (Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland) responded that there is other available data, mainly related to school drop-out, early school leavers, NEET, etc. Countries' additional related data mostly concerns young people who have left school for a specified reason.

In addition, a few countries stated that additional data on OoS learners is collected at local levels, but is not available at the national level.

Overall, the country responses indicate that the **current EASIE data collection questions require further work and development.**

2.3 What data collection is needed for future EASIE work?

Nine countries (Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Finland, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, UK (Scotland), UK (Wales)) provided information on possibilities for future data collection. A wide range of topics and issues were covered. However, the top priority for most member countries is agreed terminology and an agreed definition of OoS learners that they can use before further data collection begins.

The lack of an agreed definition is seen as limiting the possibility to compare any data among countries.

In addition, it was suggested that longer-term EASIE data collection work could explore other issues with countries:

- Tracking and monitoring attendance
- How long learners are out of school
- Different degrees of absenteeism in different types of education
- Absenteeism spread over age
- Differentiation between learners who are out of formal education and learners who are long-term absentees.

An agreed definition is required that provides **clarity around what 'out-of-school' means.** It will be a **composite and universal definition**, as there is no international consensus on a definition of the concept.

The findings from the country survey and the Background Information Report (European Agency, 2020a) were used to highlight implications and proposals for future EASIE work with Agency member countries.



3. DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE ANNUAL EASIE DATA COLLECTION

The overall information from the Background Information Report (European Agency, 2020a) and the country survey clearly indicates that the EASIE work requires further development exploring issues around OoS learners. Specifically, the existing questions examining OoS learners need to be refocused and reworked within the annual data collection.

Country representatives involved in the work want agreed terminology and a shared composite and universal definition relating to 'out-of-school' to be applied in EASIE work.

Both the country information and research literature indicate that any composite definition relating to OoS learners should consider:

- the learner's age;
- compulsory education;
- access to educational opportunities;
- participation in educational opportunities.

Using these findings and ideas, revised proposals for the EASIE annual data collection work have been formulated.

3.1 Moving from thinking about *out-of-school* to *out-of-education*

For many Agency member countries, providing data strictly linked to out-of-**school** learners is fundamentally problematic. Most countries have legislation indicating that learners must be provided with and engaged in some form of educational provision. In effect, all countries' legislation requires and ensures **access to the education system** for all learners.

However, most countries also legally recognise that educational provision is wider than 'schools'. Many countries legally recognise:

- different types of formal or non-formal education programmes;
- that education can be provided in different locations or settings, including learners' homes and other organisations and institutions;
- that education might be made available by a range of providers from the public or private sector, working with/for ministries responsible for areas other than education (i.e. health, social, welfare, labour, justice, etc.).

As a consequence, some learners may not be enrolled in or attending 'school', but they may have **access to educational provision** and may be receiving some form of recognised education. Such learners may therefore be technically counted as out-of-school, but their rights to education, as outlined in Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of



the Child (United Nations, 1989), are actually being fulfilled. The '[Further Considerations](#)' section discusses how this situation relates to learners' rights to an **inclusive** education.

Within the context of Agency member countries' education systems, data collection based on the term 'out-of-school' is no longer considered applicable, as it would not show the true picture of educational provision available to all learners.

Discussions with the EASIE data experts have led to an agreement that annual data collection work will be linked to the idea of **out-of-education** learners, rather than out-of-school learners.

3.2 Moving from five to six equity issues

The EASIE data collection work has been developed to specifically examine five equity issues:

- Access to mainstream education
- Access to inclusive education
- Placement of learners with an official decision of SEN
- Gender breakdowns of data on placement of learners with an official decision of SEN
- International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level breakdowns of data on placement of learners with an official decision of SEN.

The current work indicates that a sixth equity issue is required that acts as a prerequisite for the other issues. This equity issue is **access to any form of education**.

As a result, from 2020 onwards, the EASIE data collection will include specific questions about out-of-education children/learners who have **no access to any form of education**.

To guide the data collection on this issue, the EASIE team formulated an operational definition for 'out-of-education'. This operational definition was circulated to Agency country representatives and nominated EASIE data experts for feedback in spring 2020.

Based on the inputs, the following operational definition has been agreed upon as the basis for annual data collection. Out-of-education learners are:

Children/learners who should, by law, be in some form of recognised education, but who are out of any form of recognised education.

A working definition of **recognised form of education** has also been agreed:

Any type of education organised by any recognised education provider (municipality, local or regional education provider from the public or private sector, working with/for ministries responsible for areas other than education, i.e. health, social, welfare, labour, justice, etc.).



3.3 Developing the EASIE statistical and background information questions

In line with the above proposals, the questions used for collecting [statistical data and background information](#) from countries will be revised within the annual data collection. The exact wording may change as a result of on-going feedback from the nominated EASIE data experts.

3.3.1 Revised statistical information collection

Statistical data will be collected covering **all children/learners**. Questions will ask for data covering:

- The actual population of children/learners in the typical ISCED level age ranges from pre-primary to upper-secondary education³
- All children/learners enrolled in any form of recognised education
- All children/learners enrolled in mainstream (pre-)schools, broken down by:
 - all children/learners educated with their peers in mainstream groups/classes for 80% or more of the time;
 - all children/learners educated in separate groups/classes, spending less than 80% of the time with their peers in mainstream groups/classes
- All children/learners educated outside of mainstream (pre-)schools, broken down by:
 - all children/learners educated in separate special (pre-)schools or units organised by the ministry of education;
 - all children/learners educated in separate special (pre-)schools or units organised by other sectors/ministries;
 - all children/learners educated in other recognised forms of alternative education;
 - all children/learners educated in recognised forms of home schooling
- All children/learners who should, by law, be in some form of recognised education, but who are out of any form of recognised education.

All data will be broken down by gender and by ISCED levels 02, 1, 2, and 3.

In addition, statistical data will be collected on the population of **children/learners with an official decision of SEN**, as identified by the country in question. The questions asking for this data will mirror those listed above exactly, but the population focus will be more specific, i.e. only those with an official decision of SEN.

This specific focus is in line with Agency member countries' continuing requests for specific data on this group of learners. It is also in line with the European Commission's

³ Education programmes at ISCED levels 02 (pre-primary), 1 (primary), 2 (lower-secondary) and 3 (upper-secondary) cover the typical age ranges in Agency member countries.



intention to collect data on learners with SEN to inform targets for achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (European Commission, 2020).

The specific focus of data collection on out-of-education learners with an official decision of SEN aligns with the *Global Education Monitoring Report* finding that children, adolescents and youth with disabilities – most often those with an official decision of SEN – accounted for 12% of the in-school population, but 15% of the OoS population (UNESCO, 2020). The report suggests that the lower the OoS rate, the more likely it is that children with disabilities will be among those who are out of school:

... those with disabilities are among the hardest to reach ... Relative to their peers of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school age, those with a disability were more likely to be out of school ... and those with [an] ... intellectual disability ... were 2.5 times more likely to have never been in school as their peers without disabilities (ibid., p. 71).

3.3.2 Revised qualitative information collection

Qualitative and descriptive country background information will be collected to set the statistical data in a clear context. Detailed questions will cover four areas:

1. **Describing all forms of recognised education** at ISCED levels 02, 1, 2 and 3, in line with the working definition that recognised education is organised by any approved/recognised education provider: municipality, local or regional education provider from the public or private sector, working with/for ministries responsible for education and areas such as health, social, welfare, labour, justice, etc.
2. **Describing an inclusive setting in the country**, in line with the operational definition of an inclusive setting as a form of education where the child/learner follows education in mainstream classes alongside their peers for the largest part – 80% or more – of the school week.
3. **Describing an official decision of SEN in the country**, in line with the operational definition of an official decision as leading to a child/learner being recognised as eligible for additional educational support to meet their learning needs.
4. **Describing what out-of-education means in the country**, in line with the working definition of 'out-of-education' focusing on children/learners who should, by law, be in some form of recognised education, but who are out of any form of recognised education.

Each year, the country representatives will review the background information supporting the statistical data to ensure it is current and correct.



4. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The developments outlined above are intended to ensure that the EASIE work offers a more comprehensive and cohesive database for policy-makers and other stakeholders. There are, however, a number of issues and potential limitations to the proposals that need further consideration.

Firstly, while the proposals for data collection on out-of-education learners will move the EASIE work forward, absolute data collection coverage of a country's entire potential population of learners is not guaranteed. The country survey results show that countries use different data collection permutations to highlight what UNICEF and UIS (2016) term **visible** OoS learners (learners recorded as having been enrolled in school and then subsequently recorded as having left school) and **semi-visible** OoS learners (the unrecorded drop-outs and individuals who have never enrolled in school).

However, the proposed data collection will not capture information on **invisible** OoS learners – those individuals who are not identified by any data or monitoring systems and are not represented in any database. While the numbers of these learners may be very small in countries, it should be acknowledged that they do exist. However, without radically different forms of data collection, they will remain invisible.

Secondly, clear data on out-of-education learners can be used to formulate an indicator on access to any form of education. Clearer data on access to any form of education will further inform the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). This is a step forward in the EASIE work, but it makes the indicator on access to inclusive education even more relevant and important to consider.

In considering the range of 'other' forms of education that are provided outside local school settings in Agency member countries, it may actually be that some types of education:

- contravene learners' rights to an inclusive education as outlined in Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006);
- are not in line with the 'ultimate vision for inclusive education systems' outlined in the Agency's position paper: 'all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers' (European Agency, 2015, p. 1).

Future data on access to any form of education must therefore be carefully considered against the data on access to **mainstream** education and access to **inclusive** education.

This line of argument is currently particularly relevant, given the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts. School closures, moves towards distance and blended teaching and learning methods, and the rise in home schooling highlight implications for future data collection regarding access to education and access to an inclusive education for a growing number of learners.

The launch in 2020 of annual data collection that more accurately accounts for the situation of out-of-education learners marks a step forward in the EASIE work. However, it is only one step and others will be needed in future. These may, for example, include



developments in data collection that informs the rights of other vulnerable groups, in addition to those who are officially identified as having SEN.

As countries' education systems develop, the EASIE work must also evolve if it is to fulfil its aim of providing relevant data that meaningfully informs Agency member country policy developments for inclusive education – whatever shape or form that takes in the future.



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